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OO RUEHDBU RUEHDT RUEHLMC RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHEK #0796 1501126  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 301126Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7503  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMCT/MCC THRESHOLD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0593  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1581  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0452  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0224  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0153  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1971  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1350  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: LARGE OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATION ENDS PEACEFULLY ON  
MAY 27

REF: BISHKEK 779

1. (U) SUMMARY: According to Embassy observer estimates, between 12,000 and 20,000 opposition protesters demonstrated peacefully on Bishkek's main square on May 27 for approximately 3 hours. Official Kyrgyz estimates put the size of the crowd at 15,000-20,000, while protest organizers told the Embassy that 35,000 attended. Protesters listened to speeches and a concert before ending the meeting approximately two hours early because of hot weather (around 90 degrees). END SUMMARY.

POTENTIAL CONFRONTATION HEADED OFF AT LAST MINUTE  
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2. (U) The only surprise of the day came when the Ministry of Defense late on the evening of May 26 called off plans to hold a large Armed Forces Day celebration on the square at the same time as the demonstration. The MOD claimed that it was postponing the celebration until May 29 because of expected rain (the day ended up being warm and sunny). The MOD decision defused a potential confrontation between demonstrators and government forces, in that neither side initially appeared willing to give up use of the square.

3. (U) Demonstration organizers made a number of minor demands. One organizer told the Embassy she and other protest leaders would meet with Prime Minister Kulov to discuss their demands on May 29. Neither President Kulov nor President Bakiyev addressed the crowd.

SMALLER POLICE PRESENCE  
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4. (U) As expected, police were out in force on and around the square. According to the Interior Ministry, 3,000 police were deployed, including riot units, horse mounted police, armored vehicles and water cannons. Nevertheless, according to Embassy observers, the police presence was significantly less than during the April 29 opposition demonstration.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: In recent weeks, opposition leaders have

indicated that this will be the last demonstration until the fall, when they will reassess President Bakiyev's progress (or lack thereof) on their demands. Once again, everyone in Bishkek is breathing a sigh of relief at the peaceful conclusion to the demonstration. The lack of heated rhetoric by the opposition in the run-up to the protest, as well as the reduced police presence on May 27, may indicate that both sides are learning to accept even large demonstrations as a normal part of the political process.

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